Leading Minds – Howard Gardner

“A leader is an individual who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings, and /or behaviors of a significant number of individuals” (Gardner, 1995). In Gardner’s collection of eleven “detailed portraits,” he attempts to highlight what he refers to as effective twentieth century leadership. He selected leaders from political, business, military, the arts, sciences, and professions to provide a wide spectrum of leadership constructs. According to Gardner, stories speak to both parts of the human mind – its reason and emotion. The following case studies are presented:

*Margaret Mead*

*J. Robert Oppenheimer*

*Robert Maynard Hutchins*

*Alfred P. Sloan, Jr.*

*George C. Marshall*

*Pope John XXIII*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

*Martin Luther King, Jr*

*Margaret Thatcher*

*Jean Monnet*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

The book ends in an analysis of the stories and their implications for the future. He recounts the six constants of leadership: the story, the audience, the organization, the embodiment, direct and indirect leadership, and the issue of expertise. After posing three questions around the topic of leadership, followed by trends affecting the 20th century leader, Gardner provides an analysis of the eleven leaders viewed along the “dimensions of leadership”. These “stories of identity” help individuals think about and feel who they really are, where they come from, and where they are headed (Gardner, 1995, p.43).

Personal note: In Part I – A Framework for Leadership, Gardner provides an interesting and informative overview of this cognitive approach to leadership. Chapter 3, in particular, provides the reader with an analytical framework for understanding the stories that follow.